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SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE

LIBRARY GAZETTE

Volume XI, Number 2 Friends of the Library Summer, 1978

American Popular Culture

Paul C. Taylor

The Friends of the Library purchased last fall twenty-four volumes in the Arno Press's reprint series entitled "Popular Culture in America," which was published in 1975. Most of the volumes selected by the four series editors, who are among the most established authorities in the field, are meant to be representative examples of popular culture as it existed between 1800 and 1926.

The largest category of books in the series is the popular novel:

Alger, Horatio. *Making His Way; Or, Frank Courtney's Struggle Upward* (n.d.).

Carter, Nicholas (John R. Coryell). *The Stolen Pay Train* (n.d.). One of 1500 titles in which Carter, king of American detectives, was the main character.

Evans, Augusta. *St. Elmo* (1867). A widely read domestic novel.

Finley, Martha. *Elsie Dinsmore* (1868). The original and best of the 27 Elsie Dinsmore novels.

Fitzhugh, Percy K. *Roy Blakeley on the Mohawk Trail* (1925). The first of many novels by Fitzhugh, whose heroes were Boy Scouts, such a Blakeley, Tom Slade, and Pee Wee Harris.

Old Sleuth (Harlan Halsey). *Flyaway Ned; Or, The Old Detectives Pupil.* One of 500 novels in which Old Sleuth was the hero.

The next largest category is the autobiographies of some of the most successful promoters of the popular arts who shrewdly analyzed popular culture in their efforts to explain why they were successful:

Gauvreau, Emile. *My Last Million Readers* (1941). By the editor of Bernarr McFaden's *Daily Graphic* and the master of sensational journalism.

Haldeman-Julius, Emanuel. *The First Hundred Million* (1928). Haldeman-Julius published the five-cent "Little Blue Books" which reprinted 1200 titles by or about Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Moliere, Jack London, and Margaret Sanger. Sales of these books eventually reached 500 million copies. A companion volume in the Arno series is an anthology of Little Blue Books.

McGraw, John J. *My Thirty Years in Baseball* (1923). By the great manager and leader of the game.

Whiteman, Paul and Mary Margaret McBride. *Jazz* (1926). Whiteman was the orchestra leader who did so much to popularize jazz and to make it respectable.

Among the other volumes in the Arno series are the influential biographies of Davey Crockett and Buffalo Bill (1833 and 1886, respectively), Walter Camp's rule book and commentary on American football (1891), a typical joke-book (1878), the New York Tribune's *Almanac and Political Register for 1876*, John Ridpath's influential *History of the United States, Prepared Especially for the Schools* (1876), an anthology of Indian captivity narratives (1867), two volumes of popular poetry (1831 and 1885, respectively) and how-to-do-it books on public speaking (1845), hunt-and fishing (1866) and games and tricks (also 1866).

Judging from these titles one must conclude that the series editors view popular culture as those popular arts which were consciously created for widespread distribution in order to entertain and, often, to instruct. Certainly they do not see popular culture as primarily the product of the culture of the plain folk. In fact, most of the creators of these popular arts might well be considered to be members of the elite. By

virtue of their success in creating very popular entertainment and instruction they were often wealthy. Most of them were much better educated and better read than the average citizen.

Is it possible, one wonders, for popular culture to be the product of an elite, even when it is widely disseminated? A better label for arts created for the masses by an elite might be "mass culture." The trouble with this label is that some of the examples of mass-produced culture in this series are elitist. This is true of the writings of Moliere, Shakespeare and Nietzsche reprinted in the Little Blue Books. Some of the seemingly "popular" forms of culture included in the series were actually intended primarily for the elite. Although football became widely popular in the twentieth century it was an elite game when Walter Camp of Yale wrote his *American Football* in 1891. It was developed at Yale and other Ivy League colleges at a time when they were the preserves of the wealthy and consciously aristocratic groups. The original purpose of the game was to train sons of the elite in the skills of teamwork and leadership. It was meant to be a "moral equivalent of war," in the absence of a large officer class in time of peace.

The definition of popular culture as popular art clearly has limitations, yet it is still widely used by scholars of popular culture. One of the most stimulating and lucid champions of this definition is Daniel J. Boorstin. In his study of contemporary American popular culture[1], he suggested that American popular culture is quite different from European popular culture. In Europe it is local, traditional, and the unselfconscious product of the folk. It is made up of such things as customary songs, games, religious festivals and rituals. In America, he contended, popular culture is a product of the mass media, especially advertising, and shares with European popular culture basic characteristics such as "repetition, a plain style, hyperbole and tall talk, folk verse and folk music . . . in a limbo between fact and fantasy."[2] But unlike European culture it is ephemeral rather than long-lasting and traditional, national rather than local, self-consciously created rather than unselfconsciously evolved.

Boorstin made an interesting case in seeing the popular arts as the true American popular culture by viewing popular arts as a modern, media-produced culture which has replaced the old folk culture. But have they completely taken over? His description of the popular arts seems to conflict with his definition of folk culture which is that kind of culture "which ordinary people everywhere lean upon."[3] But do ordinary Americans everywhere really lean upon media-produced forms to shape decisively their crucial life-patterns such as those involving religion, family, and death? Perhaps people rely on the media more than we readers of the *Gazette* would like. But still there is a whole level of popular culture involved in Boorstin's definition which his description of popular culture does not comprehend.

[1] Boorstin, Daniel J., *Democracy and Its Discontents* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975; first edition, 1971).
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 14
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

What Every Girl Should Know

Margaret H. Sanger

between them. Thirdly, he defined culture usefully as "the forms in which people have experienced the world — the patterns of life, the symbols by which they cope" and defined cultural change as the alteration of older patterns or the creation of new ones as new experience is confronted.[5] Finally, and most impressively, in his study of what he sees as the dominant, middle class level of American culture of 1925-1945 period, he showed how the middle class reshaped their culture in many subtle ways. In reconstructing examples of how the more traditional elements of culture interact with elite culture and the popular arts, he has gone far toward developing an adequate view of popular culture.

The crucial task for historians of American popular culture is to devise a definition of it which recognizes the importance of both folk culture and the popular arts and takes into account their relationship to other elements of culture, such as elite culture. The most creative historian dealing with these problems is Professor Warren Susman of Rutgers University, who taught winter term courses at Sweet Briar in 1975, as the Mary Reynolds Babcock Visiting Professor of American Studies, and in 1978, as the Sue Reid Slaughter Visiting Professor.

In the field which he has especially made his own, American culture from 1925 to 1945, Susman published two fine essays[4] in which he clarified a number of issues. First, he refused to see American culture as merely one entity. He made distinctions between elite and popular culture, between folk and popular and between cultural levels based on class, ethnicity, and religion. Secondly, he became thoroughly conversant with several of these segments of culture in order better to discern the relationships

It is not the purpose of this article to enter into a full discussion of the problems of cultural history, as Susman and other younger scholars have approached them. But the discoveries of these scholars, which go far beyond viewing popular culture as merely the popular arts, make this Arno series on popular culture far more useful than its editors had intended. By familiarizing themselves with the latest discoveries of scholars of popular culture, college students should be able to make something more of the reading of these valuable books than simply an exercise in exposure to the popular arts. As so many students of today are heavily influenced by the media, the reading of books on the popular arts might be one of the most congenial ways we could find not only to introduce them to the whole intricate subject of cultural history, but also to develop in them stronger reading habits which might lead them to discover and to appreciate books which have higher quality than those of the popular arts.

[4]Susman, Warren, "The Thirties," *The Development of an American Culture*, edited by Stanley Coben and Lorman Ratner (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970); Susman, "Introduction," in *Culture and Commitment*, 1929-1945, edited by Warren Susman (New York: 1973).

[5]Susman, "Introduction," p.1.

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Sweet Briar College: A View of Women's Education

Anne Garrity

How was women's education viewed in the early part of the 20th century? Was the final goal to prepare women for the outside world in terms of careers, whether business or homemaking, or merely to "finish" them? Through research in the Sweet Briar College archives, I have attempted to answer these and various other questions.

> A girl will be more respected with an education than with wealth. I think female education is too much neglected—they are the ones who have the first education of children and ought to be qualified to instruct them correctly.

Such were the words of Elijah Fletcher, father of the founder of Sweet Briar College. His view is somewhat antiquated; the purpose of women's education is hardly to qualify them in child instruction, but he had the beginnings of an idea that was to become increasingly important. Women's education was neglected, particularly in the South. In 1901, Sweet Briar was chartered, as instructed by Indiana Fletcher Williams in her will. Mrs. Williams wished to establish and maintain in Virginia a school or seminary for the education of girls and young women (*Charter of Sweet Briar Institute*, 1901).

What would be the aim of this new college? Obviously education was the primary goal, but what kind of education? There was more to a college education than learning how to become a good wife and mother. When the college opened in 1906, the Board of Directors desired to " . . . combine harmoniously, literary and scientific studies with thoroughly practical training in certain artistic and industrial branches of knowledge"; a liberated view indeed. They went further to say, "To students from the South, the college will offer a training peculiarly suited to their needs and to social conditions in which they have been reared; and to all young women, from whatever section they may come, the institution will furnish a well-rounded college education preparing them for teaching, fitting them for business professions and qualifying them for a more useful life in the home." Teaching and home life are traditionally feminine occupations, but the third alternative mentioned here—business—is not. Already, women were entering the business world and a college degree was a prerequisite.

In the early years of the college, Sweet Briar often compared itself to established and respected women's colleges. The first college catalog of 1906-1907 states, "The aim of the school is to be a college of the first rank. The requirements for admission to the collegiate work and the conditions of graduation are high—fully equal to those at Vassar, Bryn Mawr and other colleges of the first rank . . . " This section of the catalog was maintained until 1908, when the comparison to Vassar and Bryn Mawr was omitted as Sweet Briar began to stand on its own merit.

The Sweet Briar faculty was consistently interested in the student's college career, both academic and otherwise. In faculty meetings, faculty discussed a range of topics, including grades, health and social privileges and infractions. The first faculty meeting established a grading system that is severe by today's standards. The traditional A-B-C method was adopted, yet anything below a C or 70% was considered a failing mark. Discussion of library hours was a frequent topic. At one meeting in 1906, "It was suggested that the library be closed at night so as to prevent the girls spending so much time reading periodicals." Another example of the extraordinary control the faculty had over how students spent

their time was the way they prevented studying on Sunday: The rest day was changed from Saturday to Monday in order to enable students to study on Monday.

At the first meeting of the second academic year, faculty discussed "whether Domestic Science should be treated as an academic subject." Home economics traditionally evokes images of a woman bustling around the kitchen preparing the family dinner or sitting dutifully at a sewing machine. The head of the Domestic Science department maintained that the amount of work in the course was equal to that of any other department and that student interest in Domestic Science was generally good. She added, however, that without organic chemistry and biology as prerequisites, the course could not be considered one of collegiate standing. Unconvinced, the faculty decided that "no student be allowed to take less than three academic subjects exclusive of Domestic Science."

The second President of Sweet Briar, Emilie Watts McVea, published, during her presidency, a small pamphlet entitled *Why a College Degree? Why a Sweet Briar Degree?*, which is an excellent look at early 20th century education. Dr. McVea argues, significantly, that a college education increases earning power. Thus, she acknowledges the role of women in the work force and the importance of a college degree in obtaining most desirable jobs.

Dr. McVea does not ignore the more traditional woman in her advocation of college education. Her second point is that a college education contributes to real homemaking. It enables women to train children in civic responsibility and to become the intellectual comrade of her husband and children. Furthermore, "Upon the foundations of the accurate study of science, she readily acquires the technical knowledge and skill necessary for the proper management of food and money" (*Why a College Degree?*, p. 3).

Dr. McVea goes further to say that a college degree is the basis for all higher specialization and that certain fields — child welfare, architecture, chemical and biological analysis, industrial chemistry and statistics—are open today that had previously been closed to women (*Ibid.*, p. 4.)

Women were beginning to want representation, not only politically, but in the work force and the academic community. New fields were open to them and a college education was of great help. In a time when the majority of women did not attend college, those who did were there to get an education and not merely to become cultured young ladies, or simply to learn to cook.

Women's colleges, such as Sweet Briar, were coming to be looked upon not as finishing schools but as places of higher learning that prepared the graduate for any and all walks of life, whether she chose to be a devoted wife and mother or a suffragette. Emilie Watts McVea put it aptly when she said of the college educated women, "She need never lack friends, she need never lack occupation."

Anne Garrity is a senior from Hinsdale, Illinois. This is an excerpt from a longer research project which she began in Gerald Berg's winter term course, Practicum in Sweet Briar History.

Minutes of Council Meeting

April 13, 1978

The Annual meeting of the Friends of the Library was held in the Conference Room of the Library at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 13, 1978 with Mrs. Helen Gravatt Watt, Vice Chairman, presiding.

Also in attendance were Mr. Leif Aagaard, Mr. Robert Artinian, Miss Lois Ballenger, Miss Laura Buckham, Mrs. Mary Bryan, Miss Lochrane Coleman, Mr. Peter V. Daniel, Mrs. Janet Foster, Mrs. Decca Frackleton, Miss Tyler

Gemmell, Mrs. Lynn Grones, Miss Mary Hartman, Mr. Henry James, Mrs. Jan Johnson, Miss Joan Kent, Mrs. Elizabeth Lipscomb, Mrs. Helen Masur, Mrs. Helen Matthew, Miss Evelyn Mullen, Mrs. Antoinette Nelson, Miss Lydia Newland, Miss Susan Pond, Mrs. Ann Reams, Mr. Russell Shipe, Mrs. Louisa Smith, Mr. Herbert Trotter, Miss Martha von Briesen, Mr. Harold B. Whiteman, Mrs. Elizabeth Wood, and Mrs. Patricia Wright.

Mrs. Watt read a telegram from Anne Pannell Taylor, Chairman, expressing her regrets at not being able to attend.

Mr. James, Secretary, said that after the Finance Committee report, he would present some corrections to the minutes as published in the winter issue of the *Gazette*.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Miss Lochrane Coleman reported that membership was up this year to 303 at present as compared with 262 last year and the contributions stood at $12,711 as compared with $10,126 in 1977. The goal of 350 members may hopefully be reached after reminder appeals are mailed in May.

Miss Coleman and the Development Office staff were warmly applauded for their successful work.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mr. Peter V. Daniel, Treasurer, distributed copies of the financial report from December 1966 to March 31, 1978 which reflected an uncommitted cash balance of $9,821. He noted how successful the Friends had been in contributing to the College over the past eleven and one-third years of their existence. The budget for next year of $3,330; the transfer of $2,500 to endowment; and $3,600 for books were approved. This total of $9,430 left a balance of $391.

Mr. James now read two corrections to the minutes of the October meeting. For the second sentence under "Finance Committee," Mr. James proposed the substitution of: "On the basis of the Treasurer's report, the Council decided that the sum of $3,000 was a conservative allocation for Library book needs at this time and that this amount could be taken from an accumulation in the Unexpended Appropriations rather than the Uncommitted Cash Balance. This accumulation has resulted from book orders not received because titles were unavailable, which had been authorized for purchase at previous meetings of the Friends."

Under "Library Needs Committee," Mr. James proposed this substitution for the second paragraph: "After much deliberation, the Library Needs Committee list, amounting to $2,980.21, was approved, with the exception that the five volumes of *Die christliche Mystik* costing $121 was returned to the Committee for further consideration, and the five requests of the English Department were rejected because they had not received proper approval within the Department. A sum of $300, approximately their cost, was granted to the Department for other selections which Mr. Rowland, Chairman, would propose. The Committee agreed that the cost of these highly specialized titles was not justified by the need for them."

"The sum approved for books purchased from Unexpended Appropriations was therefore $2,859.21."

LIBRARY NEEDS COMMITTEE

Chairman Robert Artinian introduced Jan Johnson who had helped prepare the list of faculty requests. Mr. Artinian explained that, to improve communications, initial requests are now screened by him and the Committee, returned to the Department Chairman for their final approval, and then discussed again with the Committee and the Library staff.

After considerable discussion, the list was approved as submitted, for a total expenditure of $3,590.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Ann Reams, Chairman, reported that Mr. Aagaard, Mrs. Nelson, Miss Pond, and Mr. Trotter, all members of the Council whose terms expire this June, had agreed to serve for another three years. She added that if the staff of the College would be willing to serve ex-officio, there would be room for two more in the quota of twenty allowed by the constitution. Finally, she said that the By-laws need to be amended at the fall Council meeting because of the division of Nominating and Membership into two committees. It was agreed that all committee members should not be elected to the Council, as this might inhibit the appointment of desirable experts to the committees. It was suggested that the Chairman remind commitee members that only those on the Council may vote at the fall meeting.

PUBLICATIONS AND PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Reporting for Ross Dabney, Mary Hartman said that there was still interest in the names suggested as speakers at the last fall meeting and that the *Gazette* would need an editor to elicit articles from busy faculty. She said the committee thanked Carolyn McKee for all her hard work on the *Gazette*.

LIBRARIAN'S REPORT

Mr. James welcomed Jan Johnson as the new Acquisitions Librarian and spoke of the long and devoted service to the Library and the Friends of Lydia Newland, who was given a round of applause and a standing ovation. He said the Library would engage in a critical

self-study for the reaccreditation of the College in 1979.

Expressing his gratitude for the contributions made by the Friends, President Whiteman said that the Friends had become increasingly important to maintaining the quality of the Library's collection. In the last few years the Library spending for books has risen from about $40,000 a year to over $50,000, of which the Friends contributed one-sixth.

In order to keep the faculty accurately informed about a matter of deep interest and concern to them, the President has asked that, in addition to his annual report of *actual* expenditures, Henry James also *forecast* the total potential funds available for books, including the amount that might be authorized by the Friends.

This forecast will be based on previous authorizations for books purchased by the Friends, as well as resolutions made at the Friends' annual spring meeting. Mr. Whiteman emphasized that the Friends are, of course, free to change the amount and direction of their allocation.

Mr. Whiteman also expressed his hope that the faculty would increase their requests for books so that the income available for such purposes would be fully expended. No better way of attaining outstanding or unusual books exists.

Mr. Aagaard proposed to give a book on South Africa perpared by and for Rotarians to the Library.

A tentative date for the fall Council meeting is Thursday, October 5, 1978.

With the announcement of a concert in the Chapel, refreshments and dinner in Meta Glass, and a talk by Professor Carl Hovde of Columbia University on "Thoreau and the Sense of Community," Mrs. Watt adjourned the meeting at 5:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry James, Jr.

Secretary

Lydia Newland Retires, 1940-1978

When Lydia Newland came to Sweet Briar in the fall of 1940, the imposing President Meta Glass asked her one probing question: "Do you like to live in the country?" Lydia replied that she did, without having any idea that the beautiful campus and gracious people would hold her for over thirty-seven years, beyond her retirement in February of this year.

A graduate of Skidmore College and the Columbia School of Library Science in New York, who was formerly Librarian at Dickinson Junior College in Pennsylvania, Miss Newland began work at the circulation desk and became the Reference Librarian until she was asked to take over acquisitions. In 1943, she was made Assistant Librarian, and in 1967, as Acting Librarian, she had to plan the 1967 addition and order all furnishings.

One of Miss Newland's busiest tasks was, from the beginning, to coordinate all the faculty requests that came to the Library Needs Committee of the Friends.

In these ways she helped build the collection from 50,000 volumes to its present 170,000 books and periodicals. "I remember to begin with we had only the *Cumulative Book Index* to order from, and the best place to search these heavy volumes was on the floor of the Librarian's office. I also spent a lot of time preparing exhibits which featured some of our constantly growing rare materials. I was soon put in charge of the Archives and rare books, both of which have now grown out of their present space upstairs and which have increased in value with every passing year."

In her first years which were marked by the War, she lived with Martha von Briesen, Director of Public Relations, in various faculty apartments which kept them moving thirty-seven times until they built their house in 1954.

"On the whole," Miss Newland says, "I have had a very satisfactory feeling about working at the Sweet Briar College Library." In retirement, Miss Newland will continue her extensive travels which have taken her to Alaska, the

islands of Greece, many parts of Europe, and several of the Caribbean warm spots of Club Mediteranee. Her sister Milla has come down from Vermont to live with her, and they and their dachshund Penny are now familiar figures on the Sweet Briar scene.

BOOKS RECENTLY ACQUIRED THROUGH GIFTS FROM THE FRIENDS

ART HISTORY

Butlin, Martin and Evelyn Joll. *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner*, 2 vols, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977. The first comprehensive and fully illustrated catalog of Turner's oil paintings. Accompanying each of the 550 reproductions is a discussion of the painting, including its exhibition history and critical response to it.

BIOLOGY

Sebeok, Thomas A., ed. *How Animals Communicate*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977. This three-part volume deals with theoretical issues, mechanisms, and specific examples of communications among animals, including kangaroos, kaola bears, hedgehogs, and hippopotami.

ENGLISH

Finneran, Richard J., George Mills Harper. William M. Murphy, eds. *Letters to W. B. Yeats*. 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. A highly selective collection of letters from politicians, family members, and friends, including many well-known writers and artists of Ireland and England. Useful reference for students of Irish literature and history.

HISTORY

The List and Index to the Proceedings in Star Chamber for the Reign of James I (1603-1625). 3 vols. Compiled and edited by Thomas G. Barnes and the staff of the Legal History Project. Chicago: American Bar Association Foundation, 1975. Valuable reference for Dr. Kent's course on crime and society in early modern England.

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